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INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 1228
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT IMMEDIATE 0820
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE 1687
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STATE FOR NEA/FO - GRAY; NEA/MAG - HOPKINS, HARRIS
NSC FOR ABRAMS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/04/2027

TAGS: PTER ASEC PGOV PREL CASC TS

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER TELLS AMBASSADOR SALAFISTS WERE
TARGETING US, UK INTERESTS

REF: A. TUNIS 31

1B. TUNIS 30

1C. TUNIS 16

1D. 06 TUNIS 2980

1E. 06 TUNIS 2973

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT F. GODEC FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY: On January 5, Foreign Minister Abdelwaheb Abdallah briefed Ambassador on the recent security situation in Tunisia (reflets). Abdallah said the group of very well trained "Salafists" involved in recent incidents with GOT security officials were targeting US and UK (and possibly French) interests, including specifically embassies and diplomatic residences in Tunisia. The GOT itself was also a target according to the Foreign Minister. Abdallah said the GOT has "the situation under control" and had been following the group since April 2006. Post has convened an EAC and Ambassador has briefed the UK and French Ambassadors. END SUMMARY.

12. (S) On January 5, Tunisian Foreign Minister Abdelwaheb Abdallah requested a one-on-one meeting with Ambassador to brief him on the security situation in Tunisia. Abdallah began by stressing that the GOT has the security situation "under control." He then explained that the primary objective of the group involved in two recent shoot-outs (reflets), whose twenty-five members were killed or apprehended on January 3, was to bring jihad to US and British interests in the Middle East. Specifically, Abdallah said, based on documents found in their possession, the group appeared to be targeting the US and UK embassies in Tunis as well as US and UK diplomatic residences. He added that the French may have been targets as well. Abdallah said seized documents included Google website images of US and British facilities in Tunisia, adding that a secondary target was the GOT and its institutions. Ambassador asked if the tourist industry was also a specific target, but Abdallah simply repeated that the US and UK interests were the primary target.

13. (S) Abdallah stressed that the situation was "under control," but there is still some uncertainty. "Frankly, I don't think there is a threat now," said Abdallah. He told Ambassador that the GOT had taken additional steps to reinforce security at the Embassy and US diplomatic residences. When Ambassador explained that post would have to issue a warden notice to the American community, Abdallah said he did not think that was necessary at this time. There

is still a lot of information we don't have, said Abdallah, and he promised the Ambassador that the Minister of Interior would provide more information directly to the Embassy in the coming days, specifically by January 8 or 9.

¶4. (S) Abdallah stressed repeatedly that the individuals involved were well-trained extremists. He said the GOT had been "very vigilant" and had followed the group's activities since April 2006. Abdallah said that the twenty-five individuals, who were mostly Tunisians, were Salafists who had trained in Afghanistan. The group had entered Tunisia from the Algerian border and was "very dangerous." Abdallah characterized the individuals as extremists who believed their actions would lead them to paradise. Abdallah said twelve were killed in the January 3 incident. Ambassador asked what information the GOT had on the group's related support network in Tunisia. Abdallah responded that the investigation was ongoing, but hinted that the group would have had some sort of support.

¶5. (S) Abdallah told Ambassador that when he learned of Ambassador's meeting with Secretary of State Chtioui, he asked President Ben Ali if he could brief Ambassador on the situation. (NOTE: The Ambassador had requested a meeting with Foreign Ministry Secretary of State for the Americas and Asia Saida Chtioui to obtain further information on recent events. Once Ambassador arrived at the MFA, he was informed Minister Abdallah wanted a one-on-one meeting instead. END NOTE.) Abdallah said that he was informing Ambassador at the request of Ben Ali and had not yet informed other ambassadors.

¶6. (S) Ambassador expressed his appreciation for the information and stressed the importance of continued cooperation. Ambassador asked Abdallah to continue to share all information available.

¶7. (S) Post convened an EAC at 14:30 local time (8:30 EST) and will report the outcome septel. Ambassador has shared this information with British Ambassador Alan Goult at 15:30 local time (9:30 EST) and with French Ambassador Serge Degallaix at 1700 local (11:00 EST).
GODEC